

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, April 29, 2004
Selectmen's Meeting Room

Members present: Joseph Barrell, James Heigham, Deborah Emello, Andrew McClurg, and Karl Haglund

Also present: Timothy Higgins, Senior Planner

7:03 p.m. There being a quorum, the meeting was called to order by Chairman Joseph Barrell.

7:04 p.m. Member James Heigham read the public hearing notice for an interim demolition prohibition by-law submitted to the Board by petition. Petitioner Marion Cote presented the petition due to the large number of home being constructed in Precinct 4. She is concerned with the size of the new buildings and wants the Planning Board to spend a year reviewing the issue.

James Heigham has a problem with the petition applying to the entire community and should only apply to the General Residence (R) district.

Henry Kazarian disagreed noting that the SC district could also be affected as the lots are small (9,000 square feet).

James Heigham also has a problem with the "sunset provision" language as he is not sure of its intent.

Town Historian Richard Betts appeared before the board. He noted that the structures replacing the torn down dwelling meet the requirements of the by-law. He spoke in support of the petition. He observed that "affordable housing" is also lost with tear-downs. Drainage becomes a problem as lot coverage increases. Front yards are lost as the area is turned into driveways into underground garages. There is no notification to abutters. He distributed a news article he wrote previously for the Belmont Citizen Herald. He recommends that the Board consider the front yard setback be increased to 15' not 10' as it is now (20% of the setback with a 50' lot allows a 10' setback for example). He is also concerned with the possible impacts of the petition on the McLean development. McLean should not be included if the Planning Board reports out the article favorably. The small "affordable" single-family homes are being lost.

A short discussion ensued on the height of new building relative to abutting properties. Chairman Joe Barrell noted that these are environmental problems with older dwellings (lead paint, asbestos) that are remediated by removal. Also those buildings being removed are older and obsolete by today's standards.

Andy McClurg supported two-family construction but agreed the costs are very, very high. It is really gentrification.

Mr. Betts believes 50-60 percent of existing homes exceed the 30% lot coverage requirements. This would create a hardship as these entire home owners would need to go to the Zoning Board of Appeals for any changes.

Joe Barrell is very concerned about limiting development opportunities with this proposal. Henry Kazarian strongly disagreed due to the impacts of the development. Sheila Flewelling spoke strongly in support of the petition. She wants more two-families in other zoning districts and believes the GR zone “subsidizes” the remainder of the Town.

Bill Chemelli spoke about sharing the burden through the whole Town.

Another resident noted that there are several churches in the area that may come up for development.

Marjorie Fralick, Holt Street spoke in support of the petition due to the negative impacts of the tear-down and reconstruction on her street.

Deborah Emello thought Dick Betts had some good ideas. However, she does not believe there is a problem yet due to the small numbers of tear-down, 6 in 2003, 3 in 2002 and 5 in 2001. There is no need at this time for a moratorium.

Joe Barrell asked about buildings with structural problem or those that burn down? Karl Haglund believed that they must repair the dwelling regardless of cost. Mr. Barrell also questions the enforceability of the proposal.

James Heigham motioned to recommend approval of the petition to Town Meeting but excluding the single residence D zone (due to McLean impacts). It was also agreed to recommend that the moratorium lapse on May 31, 2005 to clarify Section 6.11.4. The vote was 3:2 with James Heigham, Karl Haglund and Andy McClurg in favor and Joe Barrell and Deborah Emello opposed

8:05 p.m. Andy McClurg provided the Board with a brief update of his talk before a group of Trapelo Road business people organized by the Arlington/Belmont Chamber of Commerce. Tim Higgins was also present at the forum at the VFW Hall on Trapelo Road. He noted that the business people were loud and unanimous in their opinion that any narrowing of the road would be negative and hurt business. He also spoke about a BCF initiative to retain a MIT planning group and professor to look at reducing the pavement with the Trapelo Road corridor. He did not believe that the Town was getting any credit for the efforts to date and that the BCF proposal does not reflect the position of the business folks. He is concerned that the project could be counter-productive to the Town’s initiatives in this area. The Planning Board and the TAC need to take the lead role on this important project and wants the Board to authorize him as its representative on this issue.

Karl Haglund supported Andy McClurg as the Planning Board’s representative as Andy has carried the load of work to date. It was agreed by the Board that Andy McClurg will

be the contact person and the representative of the Planning Board on the Trapelo Road project (voted 4:0 with Andy McClurg abstaining).

8:20 p.m. The Board entertained Mr. Fred Paulsen concerning a new private interest group that has been organized to review the Chapter 40B Uplands proposal. A lengthy discussion took place with Mr. Paulsen offering the support of his citizens' group. The role of the group in the 40B Eligibility Application process was not clear. Mr. Higgins believes the Planning Board and the Town are already very familiar with a high density residential development at the Uplands site and that the issues surrounding the 300 unit proposal will be generally the same as the 250 unit proposal (that the Town has been reviewing for over one year). He also opined that the role of Mr. Paulsen's new group should remain outside that of the municipal response that he has been directed to coordinate.

Member Karl Haglund strongly disagreed with Mr. Higgins's position noting 40B proposal is 18% larger than the 250 unit condominium proposal of O'Neill.

The issue will be placed on the May 25th Planning Board meeting for discussion by the Board members. The Board should make its own comments outside of other groups and has been asked by the Town Administrator to assume a role in the process due to its familiarity with the locus and the previous 250 unit residential submittal.

Tim Higgins was asked to distribute any written information he receives. This will be done and he suggested that the Board should focus on planning issues as it is not a "decision-making" entity in this situation.

8:55 p.m. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.